

His Ideal

By DESTA E. BROWN WOODS.

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"Now, Harry, honestly you don't believe that?"

"Yes, I do. A true woman is always a coward. Brave is a masculine adjective, incapable of being used with a feminine noun."

"Oh, bosh! You are old fashioned, my boy."

"I grant you—medieval, in fact—but neither Joan of Arc nor Boadicea stir my heart like a certain little girl who faints when she pricks her finger with a pin."

"That's what it is to be in love. Your ideal is based on what you think to be Miss Osborne's character. Now, for my part, I believe that young lady capable of heroism."

"And I tell you, George Evans, that the very thought of physical pain turns her cheek pale, but in the matter of moral courage—well, I could stake my life on her there. She has such a high ideal of truth and honor. She is so!"

"Oh, yes, yes! Spare me! Remember I am not in love."

An hour later he was sitting with his fiancée, a puzzled, pained expression on his face.

"I don't think I understand you," he said slowly. "You don't mean that you told your father the money was for charity when you were spending it on this silly speculation?"

Jessie Osborne's pretty cheeks were very pink.

"Well, I thought it a good investment, and father never lets me try stocks."

"But, Jessie, you have been deceiving him for months."

A pair of little white hands flew to hide the pink cheeks.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I'm miserable, and you don't care," came in broken sobs.

"There, there," he said soothingly as he took the slight form in his arms. "I

ling, we must be honest. We must help each other to be true and morally brave."

"Of course," he mused on the way home, "but father must have known from the first what she was doing and simply meant to give her a lesson by allowing her to proceed. Poor little girl, she didn't mean any harm, but I am disappointed. I didn't think her capable of the slightest deception."

As he turned the corner leading to his boarding house the light streamed out from Dr. Gordon's office, and he dropped in for a moment's chat.

"I say, Nell, you don't look well. What's the matter?" the doctor inquired.

"Oh, I believe I have nerves, and I haven't slept well lately."

"You had better let me give you a sleeping draft and then take a week's rest soon."

The sleeping draft had the desired effect, and scarcely had Harry's head touched the pillow when he was wrapped in deep slumber. After a time he was dimly conscious of a hum of voices in the street below. The room was hot, and he tossed off some of the bedclothes. His throat smarted, and his head ached. There was a strange roaring in his ears. He struggled to rouse himself, but it was too great an effort, and he lay dreamily listening to the voices below.

"I tell you, Evans, Nell is in his room!" came in terrified tones from Dr. Gordon. "I gave him a dope, and the noise has never wakened him."

"We must take a rope to him," said Evans. And Harry wondered vaguely at the unaccustomed ring in his friend's voice.

"But how?" Again it was Dr. Gordon's voice. "The front verandas are all in flames."

"Could we reach him by means of the new building? That beam runs parallel with his room."

"It would be madness," exclaimed Mr. Osborne. "The beam wouldn't hold your weight. See! It has burned through at the end next the Nelson house."

Was it all a nightmare, Harry wondered, or was it an awful reality? But the next words which reached him cleared the vapors from his brain and made him spring from his bed with a bound.

"The beam won't hold you heavy men, but I can go. I weigh only ninety pounds. I'll take the rope," came in Jessie's well-loved voice.

Nell rushed to the window and hurriedly sized up the situation. His room was in the corner of the third flat, with two windows—one at the front of the house and one at the side. From the front window he could see the firemen at work. The verandas and whole face of the house were a mass of fire and smoke. Water from the hose played on the blaze, but the crackling of the flames came like the laughter of a victorious fiend.

He ran to the side window. A new building was in process of construction, but the skeleton structure had already caught fire.

The smoke cleared for an instant, and the crowd below caught sight of him. He recognized the white faces of Mr. Osborne, George Evans and Dr. Gordon. Life was sweet. Was there no escape? And again he scanned the new building.

Some one was coming to him—a girl in a jersey waist and short tweed skirt, carrying in her hand a coil of rope. Her face was upraised for a moment, and he recognized Jessie Osborne. Frail, timid, little Jessie amid the fire and smoke! She must not come farther, and placing his hand on the window ledge, he prepared to descend.

"Stop, you fool!" came from below. "Nell, for any sake, don't put your foot on that beam or it is death for you both!" shouted Evans.

Convinced that Evans was right, he paused and watched the girl below. Light and agile as a kitten, she climbed

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ed from beam to brace and from brace to beam.

A few hours before he had boasted of his strength and bravery, yet here he was forced to stand with folded arms while this mite of a girl brought him succor. The heat was intense and every nerve was strained to the utmost as he watched the approaching figure. One wrong step meant death.

Awed silence fell upon the watching crowd, but Jessie reached the second story in safety and then advanced cautiously until third was gained. She placed her foot carefully on the last beam and then slowly transferred her weight to it. There was a sickening crack, then a sudden lurch, which caused Harry to cover his eyes with his hands. But a shout from George Evans made him look again. The beam had only sagged, and Jessie was walking steadily toward him.

He leaned over the window ledge with outstretched arms. A moment's awful suspense, and then, with a little cry, she sprang to her lover's embrace. As her foot left the beam the huge skeleton gave way, but Jessie and her precious rope were safe in Harry's grasp.

To fasten the rope and lower his preserver to the firemen below was the work of a moment; then, hand over hand, Harry descended the improvised fire escape. He felt himself seized and carried away from the heat. He heard a confusion of cheers and sobs, and then consciousness left him.

When he came to himself he was lying on a sofa in Mr. Osborne's home, with Dr. Gordon and George Evans beside him.

"Jessie?" he queried faintly.

"Is safe and well," Dr. Gordon replied. "She escaped entirely without injury, and her father has carried her almost by main force to her room to get the rest she needs. In fact," he added, "you monopolized the woman's right of fainting."

"It was that confounded dope of yours," Harry retorted.

"It came near costing your life; but, thank God, you both escaped. Your injuries are very slight, although your bandages look formidable. The burns are only surface burns and won't even spoil your beauty, and now I must go to Miss Osborne."

As the door closed on Dr. Gordon, George Evans turned to his friend.

"What you said about Miss Osborne's sense of honor is all right, but admit like a man that I had a truer estimate of her courage. Or, say," he added jokingly, although there was a suspicious tremor in his voice, "perhaps the engagement is called off since you don't admire that type."

"I can't joke about it, George," Nell answered gravely. "The type of girl I pictured 'all right in theory, but'"

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